

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0332 0811710
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 221710Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3368
INFO RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 0489
RUEHTG/AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA 0025
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 0357
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR 0150
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000332

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/PPC - D. TOMLINSON
DEPARTMENT FOR PM/RSAT - J. BURNETT
DOD ALSO FOR NSA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [OPRC](#) [AR](#)

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: EMBASSY REQUEST FOR DOD ASSISTANCE IN GOA SEARCH
FOR LOST AIRCRAFT

¶1. Summary. Embassy requests that DOD and Southern Command consider training-related activities that might assist Argentine authorities in their ongoing search for the wreckage of a Douglas C-54 Air Force plane lost on November 3, 1965, during a training flight from Howard AFB Panama to San Salvador, El Salvador. The plane, lost with 59 air force cadets and nine crew, had reported a failed engine and other electrical problems while flying over the Caribbean north and east of Panama. The altered flight path may have taken it over land in western Panama or southeastern Costa Rica. Embassy is prepared to facilitate information from GOA and private sources on past searches and recent investigations of the case. End Summary.

¶2. The Argentine Air Force Commander, Brigadier General Normando Costantino, wrote the Ambassador October 6, 2008, to request USG assistance in the country's episodic but ongoing efforts to locate the remains of an Air Force Douglas C-54, tail number TC 48, which is presumed to have crashed on November 3, 1965. The plane with nine crew was carrying 59 young cadets on a training trip from Buenos Aires to Mexico City. Its loss on the Panama (Howard AFB) to San Salvador leg became a huge national story. Families of the lost cadets and crew continue to press for locating the plane. The pilot's report of an engine on fire, other electrical problems, and search for an emergency landing site were conveyed to a commercial aircraft and to another Argentine Air Force plane on the same route. U.S. military based in Panama at the time were involved in search operations.

¶3. Costantino's specific request was for helicopter transport support for a search (Operation Humanitarian Hope II) that took place November 6 to 18 of last year in the Costa Rican jungle near "Cerro Sinsal." Under a short time-frame, we were not able to coordinate assistance. That Argentine-Costa Rican effort did not locate the crashed plane, and Air Force authorities have shared with us their continuing desire for USG support. Any USG involvement in this effort would generate substantial goodwill among Argentina's armed forces and public at large.

¶4. Action Request: Embassy requests Department of State endorsement and request for support from the Department of Defense and Southern Command for assistance in the search for Argentina TC 48. We encourage consideration be given to activities that would meet current training or operational needs of U.S. military forces in the region while advancing the search. Logistical support for future ground searches or deployment of canopy-penetrating or ocean floor-mapping technologies or other assistance from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency might be some options, but any appropriate engagement in line with U.S. capacities and training needs would be welcome by the GOA.

15. Contacts: Embassy POC on the TC 48 is Military Group U.S. Air Force Section Chief Lt Col Greg Green. He can be reached at [54] 11-5777-4614 and by email at Gregory.Green@tcsc.southcom.mil.

WAYNE